DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 462 536 CE 082 659

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TITLE	Workers' Knowledge: An Untapped Resource in the Labour Movement. NALL Working Paper.
INSTITUTION	Ontario Inst. for Studies in Education, Toronto. New Approaches to Lifelong Learning.
SPONS AGENCY	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Ottawa (Ontario).
REPORT NO	NALL-WP-31-2001
PUB DATE	2001-00-00
NOTE	18p.; Paper presented at the International Conference on Union Growth (Toronto, Ontario, April 30-May 1, 2001).
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/depts/sese/csew/nall/res/31workers.ht m.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; *Continuing Education; Developed Nations; Employee Attitudes; *Employees; Employer Attitudes; Employer Employee Relationship; Foreign Countries; Independent Study; *Informal Education; Job Skills; Labor Force; Nonformal Education; Off the Job Training; Postsecondary Education; Quality of Working Life; *Unions
IDENTIFIERS	*Canada; Member Union Relationship; Union Leadership

ABSTRACT

A study analyzed the schooling, further adult course participation, and informal learning of organized and unorganized workers in different occupational classes across Canada. Data were obtained from the first Canadian national survey of 1,562 adults' informal learning practices, conducted in 1998, and field notes and interview transcripts drawn from participants in the auto plant case study of the Working Class Learning Strategies project conducted at five union locals in southern Ontario in 1995-2000. The study found that unionized and non-unionized industrial and service workers in Canada are increasingly highly educated, increasingly participating in adult education courses and devoting substantial amounts of their time to informal learning activities outside organized education and training programs. In addition, the study found that working people are generally engaged collectively and individually in an extensive array of employment-related and other informal learning activities that are neither fully recognized by most employers or union leaders nor given prior learning credit by educational institutions. The study concluded that underestimation of the current range and depth of workers' knowledge and skills by union leaders represents a significant barrier to further growth of the labor movement. Recommendations for strategies to facilitate union growth are suggested, based on what has worked most effectively in these locals of differing general organizational strength and demographic profiles. (KC)

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D. W. Livingstone
Reuben Roth

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Workers' Knowledge: An Untapped Resource in the Labour Movement

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Paper presented at the International Conference on Union Growth, Toronto, April 30-May 1, 2001

ABSTRACT

This paper makes the argument that underestimation of the current range and depth of workers' knowledge and skills by union leaders represents a significant barrier to further growth of the labour movement. Surveys and case studies conducted by the SSHRC research network on New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL) have found that unionized and non-unionized industrial and service workers in Canada are increasingly highly educated, increasingly participating in adult education courses and devoting substantial amounts of their time to informal learning activities outside the purview of organized education and training programs. Working people are generally engaged collectively and individually in an extensive array of employment-related and other informal learning activities that are neither fully recognized by most employers or union leaders nor given prior learning credit by educational institutions.

This paper will provide an empirical analysis of the schooling, further adult course participation and informal learning of organized and unorganized workers in different occupational classes across Canada and offer some in-depth profiles of workers' learning activities based on a case study in a unionized auto plant with one of the most extensive worker education programs in the country. In light of the massive amount of informal learning among working people, the strong popular demand for access to advanced education and training programs, the increasingly widespread support for use of prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) and the proliferation of accessible forms of information technology able to facilitate learning networks among workers, it is imperative for unions to address the growing learning interests of workers with more responsive and inclusive educational approaches and programs in order to enhance membership solidarity and attract new members. The major data sources are the first Canadian national survey of adults' informal learning practices (N=1562) conducted in 1998 and field notes and interview transcripts drawn from participants in the auto plant case study of the Working Class Learning Strategies project conducted at five union locals in southern Ontario during the 1995-2000 period.[1] Recommendations for future education programming strategies to facilitate union growth are based on what has worked most effectively in these locals of differing general organizational strength and demographic profiles.

Introduction

The peoples of the Western world are now truly living in learning societies. Behind the rhetoric about "knowledge-based economies" and "learning organizations", there is the reality of extraordinary increases in the incidence of adult learning activities during the past two generations. Some indication of the magnitude of these changes is provided by statistics on the incidence of participation in the three basic dimensions of learning: formal schooling; non-formal adult education courses; and informal learning.[2] Between 1961 and 1998, the proportion of Canadian adults aged 25 to 29 who had obtained university degrees increased from 4 percent to 26 percent. Between 1971 and 1998, the proportion of this age cohort who had received some form of university degree or college certificate grew from 25 percent to 58 percent. In response to rapid economic and environmental changes and the availability of new information technologies – and in spite of the time crunch of paid employment and unpaid household and community work pressures – Canadian adults are also spending much more time in adult education courses, primarily associated with pursuit of more educational credentials and upgrading employment skills. The participation rate in adult courses increased from about 4 percent in 1960 to over 30 percent by the early 1990s. Informal learning activities associated with paid and unpaid work and their other

general interests have always been much more widespread than participation in organized education programs. But informal learning activities may also have increased substantially during this period. In 1998, the SSHRC-funded research network on New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL) conducted the first large-scale survey anywhere in the past generation on the informal learning activities that adults do outside educational institution courses. The NALL survey found that Canadians on average are spending about 15 hours per week in informal learning This is significantly more time than the 10 hours a week a prior U.S. national survey and a series of case studies found adults devoting to informal learning in the early 1970s.[3]

Table 1 summarizes relevant current learning profiles of the employed Canadian labour force by occupational class. Long established class differences persist in both schooling and adult education course participation. The majority of corporate executives, professionals and managers have university degrees while less than 10 percent of service and industrial workers have obtained degrees. Over half of those in the employed labour force participated in some form of course or workshop in the past year but corporate executives, professionals and managers were twice as likely to participate as industrial workers. However, as Table 1 also confirms, there are no such class differences in the incidence of self-reported employment-related or general informal learning. Industrial workers are almost as likely to devote time to employment-related informal learning activities as corporate executives and spend similar amounts of time engaged in informal learning projects. The vast majority of workers are actively involved in quite extensive employment-related learning activities. Indeed, industrial workers are found to spend more time in employment-related informal learning (an average of nine hours a week) than occupational classes with higher course participation rates, perhaps partly to compensate for limited access to organized courses. There is a massive, more egalitarian informal learning society hidden beneath the pyramidal class structured forms of schooling and further education courses (see Livingstone, 1999a, 1999b).

Table 1 Occupational Class by Schooling, Course Participation, Employment-related Informal Learning, and Total Hours of Informal Learning, Employed Canadian Labour Force, 1998

Occupational Class	University Degree (%)	Course or Workshop (%)	Employ.-related Informal learning (%)	Total informal learning (hrs./week) (%)
Corporate exec*	70	71	98	15
Manager	52	73	97	17
Professional	76	66	92	13
Small employer	40	52	91	16
Self-employed	28	52	90	14
Supervisor	20	63	87	14
Service worker	12	54	81	17
Industrial work.	8	33	83	17
Total	26	56	86	16

Source: Livingstone (2001b). N=951
*Data for Ontario from Livingstone, Hart and Davie, (1999).

For purposes of this paper the most important point about the changes in profiles of adult learning since the 1960s is that they pervade all social classes, including the organized and unorganized working class of industrial and service workers. Table 2 summarizes the basic changes in formal educational attainments across age cohorts of unionized industrial and service workers. While the majority of organized workers over 55 have not completed high school, nearly 90 percent of those under 35 have done so and nearly half of those under 35 have completed a postsecondary degree or diploma program. While the proportion of organized workers with university degrees remains much smaller than in the professional and managerial classes, it is about nine times greater among the 25-34 age group than in the over 55 age group. The increases for unorganized workers are similar. Most large workplaces in Canada

now have a workforce that contains a substantial and growing number of hourly rated employees with advanced formal education, a majority of workers who are interested in pursuing further education and a vast majority of active informal learners (see Livingstone, 2001b).

Table 2 Age Group by Formal Educational Attainment, Unionized Industrial and Service Workers, Canada, 1997

Age Group	Less than high school completion (%)	high school diploma + (%)	post-secondary degree (university) (%)
25-34	12	40	48 (9)
35-44	20	39	41 (5)
45-54	26	36	38 (4)
55-64	55	18	27 (1)
Total	23	37	40 (5)

Source: 1997 Adult Education and Training Survey Data Archive

In spite of impressive gains in educational participation and achievement by working class people, their collective skills and learning capacities continue to be underestimated or ignored by employers, government agencies and even many labour leaders. For one thing, the prevalence in schooling of forms of knowledge and language codes most familiar to the affluent classes continues to obscure the less visible forms of working class knowledge and competency. Contemporary social researchers have documented these discriminatory school practices in excruciating detail (e.g. Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bernstein, 1990; Curtis et al, 1992). But even such "cultural capital" theorists have been preoccupied with delineating the cultural reproduction of inequality within fixed educational institutional forms; so they frequently fail to comprehend the creative cultural practices, independent education and learning activities or collective cultural agency of the organized working class (see Livingstone and Sawchuk, 2000).

Most empirical studies of learning and employment have also probably been conducted from standpoints too closely aligned with the current objectives of enterprise management to appreciate workers' repertoire of learning activities. From a conventional management perspective, virtually the only relevant learning for employees is job training that can enhance the productivity or profitability of the company. From this top-down vantage point, much of the learning that workers do both on and off the job is irrelevant and effectively non-existent. But recent survey studies have confirmed that most job-related training is done informally (see Betcherman et al, 1997; Center for Workforce Development, 1998). Through a combination of initial schooling, further adult education, and informal learning (including both informal training and non-taught learning), the vast majority of workers manage to become at least adequately qualified for their current jobs. Yet the dominant discourse about a pressing need for creation of "learning organizations" largely ignores or depreciates these realities of interaction between organized education, informal learning and job performance, and presumes that the central challenge for improved enterprise performance is for workers to become more active and motivated learners. Furthermore, many valuable transfers of knowledge and skill between these basic forms of learning and among the spheres of paid and unpaid work are similarly unrecognized or discouraged by the current organization of paid workplaces (Livingstone, 1999b).

The few Canadian studies that have conducted comparative empirical assessments of the utilization of knowledge by different occupational classes have found that they spend similar amounts of time in employment-related informal learning, but that corporate executives, managers and professional employees have been much more likely to be enabled to apply their general work-related learning in their jobs than were industrial and service workers (Livingstone, 1997). Since adult learning has increased rapidly while changes in skill and knowledge requirements of the job structure have been more gradual, many Canadians now find themselves underemployed in the sense that they are unable to use many of their employment-related skills in their current jobs. There are multiple dimensions to underemployment (see Livingstone, 1999b for discussion and documentation). "Credential

underemployment" refers to the proportion who have attained at least one educational credential higher than is currently required for entry into their job. Estimates based on the NALL survey indicate that around 30 percent of the current Canadian labour force have at least one credential higher than required for entry to their current job (see Livingstone (2001b). As Table 3 summarizes, there are marked differences in credential underemployment rates between occupational classes. Only around 10 percent of corporate executives, professionals and managers have educational credentials greater than their jobs require for entry, while about 40 percent of service workers and industrial workers do. In spite of the relative lack of access to university education for those from lower socio-economic positions, there appears to be a massive underutilization of the achieved skills and knowledge of the Canadian working class in the current job structure.

Table 3 Occupational Class by Credential Underemployment, Canadian Employed Labour Force, 1998

Occupational Class	Credential Underemployment (%)
Corporate exec.	9
Manager	13
Professional	16
Small employer	28
Self-employed	30
Supervisor	30
Service worker	41
Industrial worker	38
Total	28

Source: Livingstone (2001b)

Nevertheless, as Table 4 shows, the gap between current participation in organized education and desired engagement if there were significant recognition of prior relevant knowledge and skill development (via prior learning assessment and recognition mechanisms or PLAR) is very significant for working class people and non-existent for corporate executives, professionals and managers. Industrial workers and the unemployed would double their course participation if they could receive recognition for their prior informal learning experience. The pent up demand for further education that recognizes already established learning competencies among the working class as legitimate and assists in developing them may have been almost as much ignored as extensive informal learning activities per se.

Table 4: Occupational Class by Further Education, Interest in PLAR Credit and Participation Gap, Active Labour Force, 1998

Occupational Class	(1)Course Last Year (%)	(2)Interest in Courses if PLAR* offer (%)	Participation Gap (2)-(1) (%)
Corporate executives	71	61	-10
Small employers	52	58	+6
Self-employed	52	69	+17
Managers	72	62	-10
Professionals	76	69	-7
Service workers	54	73	+19
Industrial workers	37	73	+36
Unemployed	38	82	+44
Total	50	70	20

Source: Livingstone (2001b)
* Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition

The NALL survey also found that unionized workers generally spend a greater average amount of time in employment-related informal learning than nonunionized workers (7 hours versus 4.5 hours per week) and that organized workers' underemployment rates are somewhat lower than unorganized workers (Livingstone, 1999b). This suggests the existence of previously unexplored links between knowledge and power in workers' learning practices. In general, the sites where subordinated groups have the greatest control over their social practices are the places where their own cultural knowledge reproduction and generation may be most frequent. Where workers have greater job control, they may more easily apply their prior knowledge. While much of workers' general knowledge may be irrelevant from employers' perspectives for the immediate objective of enhancing current job performance, it is at least potentially applicable in negotiations to redesigned jobs to more fully use workers' growing repertoire of skills – as well as in other socially useful and fulfilling household and community work where workers exercise more direct control. Furthermore, where worker-controlled education programs are readily available, workers may be more likely in both material and motivational terms to integrate their further education and informal employment-related learning Organized workers by definition have the greatest power to produce and apply their own knowledge.

Our case studies of workers' learning practices have been conducted over the 1995-2000 period in southern Ontario in cooperation with a diverse array of five union locals (see Livingstone, Sawchuk et al, forthcoming). The research has included consultation with union leaders and key informants about general work and learning conditions in the workplace, in-depth semi-structured interviews with representative samples of workers (total N=101) conducted near the worksite, and a giveback process in which we worked with each local to identify program gaps and prospects. In general, we have found that there are both relatively closer links between workers' informal knowledge and their participation in further education programs, and also lower levels of underemployment, in more economically powerful locals. These are large locals that have relatively extensive worker-run union education programs as well as co-operative programs with local educational institutions developed in response to worker demand, all of which are provided with sustainable resource support through negotiations with employers, national and district union offices, and government programs. Conversely, small locals with very limited budgets and often spatially scattered memberships face much more difficult barriers to generating relevant worker education programs.

But even the leading union education programs suffer from a failure to recognize many aspects of current workers' formal and informal knowledge and skills that could be used within the locals for mutual support, negotiations with employers, development of more responsive and creative worker education programs, as well as to aid wider organizing efforts in the labour movement. We have discovered, for example, that many assembly line workers in large manufacturing plants have developed informal learning networks to teach themselves how to use personal computers. Some of these workers have become competent computer programmers even though they have no employer encouragement and no immediate opportunities to use these skills in their jobs and, in some cases, no prior recognition of their skills by union leadership which could sorely use them (Sawchuk, 1996).

In the next section, we focus on the positive and negative experiences of some younger, well-educated autoworkers in trying to use their formal and informal knowledge within a well-endowed union local with relatively extensive education programs. Even here, there are signs of underestimation of workers' rich knowledge bases, the current underuse of their advanced skills in many jobs and in established union education programs, and a lack of attention to legitimating and valorizing such prior knowledge through union-led campaigns with employers for better quality jobs to reduce underemployment and with educational institutions for PLAR. All this suggests there is still major untapped potential in workers' knowledge that can be mobilized both for internal strengthening and expansive growth of the labour movement.

CAW Case Study

The Southern Ontario manufacturing complex under study encompasses one of the largest groupings of industrial workers in Canada. Although still quite large by most standards, its employment base and membership size have dwindled greatly over the past 15 years.[4] The newest employees at this complex were hired in 1985 and the average age of workers in the mostly-male workforce is approximately

forty-five. These employees are represented by the Canadian Auto Workers union (CAW), the largest private sector union in the country, with the most extensive collection of worker education programs in the Canadian labour movement (see Yates 1993; Friesen, 1994; Spencer, 1994; Taylor, 2001). Since the breakaway from the Detroit-based United Auto Workers union and the inception of the CAW in 1985, these programs have been both deepened and widened substantially.[5]

The CAW's internal education programs (CAW Canada Website, 1997) generally follow one of two paths. First, local union education committees design and deliver 'tool-based' weekend or evening courses covering committeeperson (or steward) training, grievance procedures, collective bargaining, workers' compensation and the like. Second, there are programs which seek to develop a social union cadre, including: Workplace Change and Competitiveness, Unions and Politics, Human Rights, Empowering Workers of Colour, Womens' Activism, Political Science, Environmental Awareness, Family Law, Labour and the Internet, Globalization and Democracy and the CAW National's Paid Educational Leave (PEL) program (see Table 5 below). The PEL program is a four-week, adult education course which was first negotiated in 1977 by the UAW's Canadian Region. Paid Education Leave is a residential program which takes place at the CAW's Family Education Centre, located in Port Elgin, Ontario. The PEL curriculum includes subject areas such as labour history, sociology, political science and economy as well as public speaking, communications and media literacy (Gindin, 1995). This program's goal is to build leadership within the ranks and to cultivate activists with a commitment both to the union and to social transformation. Anti-racist education and critiques of the excesses of capitalism are prime features of PEL and other CAW programs (Sugiman, 1994). Lastly, the affiliated CAW Family Education program, which also takes place at the Port Elgin educational facilities, brings social union principles to the member's family and community (Roth, 1997).

The motivations for undertaking educational programs vary widely among members of this union local. While many pursue courses which address their current job insecurity and search for 'something to fall back on' during times of structural unemployment (Milkman, 1997), others feel that union-sponsored courses provide a necessary – though unofficial – qualification for elected office.

Workers here have fertile educational opportunities. For example, while many industrial workplaces have a provision whereby an employer will fund training related directly to the workplace, these employees have negotiated a broad-based program which encompasses an extended range of subjects outside of the workplace. In a traditional training allowance program, those employees who wish to earn, for example, a welding, electrical or carpentry certificate will often see some form of financial redress via an employer-run 'training allowance' program, but there must generally be some connection to the operations performed in the workplace. However, this local has an added feature not generally found in most union agreements: a joint union-employer sponsored initiative in which the employer reimburses employees for a broad variety of formal and nonformal (course-based continuing education) programs, whether these are directly related to the job or not. This initiative is one of the most diversified joint management-labour programs which allows workers here the opportunity to undertake educational courses at area community colleges, school boards and universities, with tuition and books paid for by the employer.

Table 5: CAW Local Union, Provincial/National Labour and Joint Employer-Union Programs

Local Union Seminars	National programs	Joint Programs
Steward Training	Paid Education Leave (PEL)	"Training Allowance"
Health and Safety	Human Rights	Pre-Retirement
Workplace Change, Globalization and Democracy	Health and Safety	WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System)
Legislative Agenda	Environmental Awareness	
Women's Activism	Worker's Compensation	Other Programs
Grievance Procedures, Collective Bargaining	Work Reorganization	CAW/McMaster Labour Study Certificate
Workers' Compensation (WSIB)	Substance Abuse	Workers' Health and Safety Centre
Time Study	Bargaining Issues	Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL)
Employment Insurance	Steward Training	Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)
Human Rights (I-III)	Women's Issues	District Labour Council
Home Budgeting	Employment Insurance	
Labour Law, Family Law		
CPR		

Sources: CAW National office, local union sources.

Although its original comprehensive mandate has been narrowed in recent years, this program has allowed workers to pursue postsecondary programs in areas as diverse as museum studies and sociology, as well as golf club repair, computer animation and more traditional trades such as pipefitting and tool-and-die making. In short, these programs and courses provide great opportunities for members to participate in courses and programs on nearly any subject of interest. It is hard to deny that there is a comparatively rich array of nonformal learning opportunities which exist for CAW members at this site.

Table 6: Nonformal Education in Five Union Locals

Union Local	Average course hours per week
CAW	11.2
OPSEU	4.0
CEP	1.9
USWA	0.5
ILGWU/UNITE	0
Weighted Average	5.5 (225 hrs/yr)

Source: Livingstone, Sawchuk and contributors (forthcoming).

As Table 6 shows, the relatively rich opportunities for course participation is reflected in the average hours of course-based learning at this CAW site when compared with the other four union locals we studied. The CAW members spend almost three times as much time on organized courses as the next highest local and far more than those in the other smaller and poorer locals. (Livingstone, Sawchuk and contributors, forthcoming).

Informal Learning Among Autoworkers

But as adult educators know, organized courses are only the tip of the iceberg of adult learning (Tough, 1979). Like most adults, industrial workers do most of their learning informally in their everyday activities. It is the informal learning that workers do within their own workplace communities that provide the most basic knowledge ingredients. For production workers there is scant chance of advancement on the assembly line and therefore little advantage in demonstrating their work-related

knowledge. But, among one's peers within the workplace or union, the multiple opportunities to deepen and display one's knowledge underlines the social fact that this is a 'community of learners'. As Table 1 has shown, the NALL survey found that industrial workers spend virtually as much time in work-related and general interest informal learning activities as corporate executives and professionals (Livingstone, 2001b).

Workers here commented on how they use other people's lived experience as a source of informal, transferable knowledge. One respondent touches on his rich experiences and refers to a union official's source of knowledge as the equivalent of a 'library' to him:

> Like it's hard to believe, there's a lot of time spent ... It's almost like a library if you need something, you have to go to a library, you seek it out, without taking a course. And that's what life is generally like if you're trying to do anything, I guess, because you have to seek out who knows.

Table 7 confirms that members of this CAW local have a significantly higher incidence of informal learning than those at the other sites we studied.

Table 7: Informal Learning Across Five Union Locals

Union Local	Informal Learning (hrs./wk)
CAW	23.4
USWA	9.0
OPSEU	7.2
CEP	6.7
ILGWU/UNITE	4.6
Weighted Average	11.4 (600 hrs/yr)

Source: Livingstone, Sawchuk and contributors (forthcoming).

There is a vast array of informal learning practices among the local union activists we interviewed. As this worker put it:

> I take anything I learn in the labour movement as being educational ... period. Newspapers, past courses I've dug up for article research for as far as writing something in [the local union newsletter], other people's collective agreements to see what we need for our locals. I mean, all of that's kind of informal, I guess, learning.

With zeal and a level of commitment some scholars suggest can be found only within the ranks of career professionals and executives (Senge, 1990; Reich, 1991), workers' collective involvement can take them into intensive informal learning activities:

> [we] can go sit down and have a beer, but we could be discussing union stuff and learning ... [we] were supposed...to watch a hockey game once, with some buddies ... [but] we never talked hockey [instead] we talked union issues and labour problems ... right from eight to one in the morning. I'm listening, I'm learning ... all coming into my mind. The whole time I did learn. ... [A]fter a union hall meeting, often we go out and talk about stuff and it's work-related.

Irrespective of the many inspiring gains in educational participation and attainment achieved by the workers documented here, their growing skills and abilities continue to be underestimated and neglected by both employers and their unions. A substantive illustration of an employer – not only disavowing but – filching a worker's knowledge can be found in the experience of the following respondent:

> ... they [management] found out that I had computer knowledge, my group leader ... gave

> me a stack of papers, he said "you know, I only need these two pages ... can you just print them for me?" So I just created a spreadsheet [and] printed them out ... [but on] only one page ... . He went to the meeting ..[where] everybody had this stack [of paper] .. and everybody said "where'd you get it [the ability to condense to one sheet]?" ... "I have a friend who does it..he's on the floor, he's working with us." ... They said "well, we need somebody who can do all this work" ... during the pilot [test stage of production]. I measured all these cars in a specific area. ... gathered all that information, put it on a spreadsheet, charts and by the end of the pilot had it ready for the engineer to hand it in for presentation ... the engineer he took my name [off] and he put his name on it.

After this bitter experience — and several like it — this worker has decided that he will no longer share his knowledge of computers with management, although he does concede that he gratefully receives several hours per week away from his assembly job in order to "help" his supervisor keep up-to-date records of overtime on his computer — a task his supervisor should in fact be performing. This learner reports that since this incident took place, his familiarity with computers has been exploited by his employer many times, with no recognition for his efforts other than time away from the drudgery of his usual assembly work. Since his skills have not been recognized by plant management in a concrete manner, he has refocused his learning efforts away from his employer and has concentrated on a community college certificate in computer graphics. In other words, this worker has surrendered the possibility that his employer might one day reward him for his learning and proffer him employment which is commensurate with his knowledge. After several attempts at advancement within his workplace he acknowledges that his education is "wasted" there. The overexploitation of this workers' knowledge and skill has not been addressed by the union, nor has he volunteered or been encouraged to apply his talents to aid union-based program development.

Two Workers' Learning Profiles

The two workers highlighted here are examples of comparatively well-educated trade union activists. Both workers are under forty-five and share progressive perspectives on trade unionism and working-class education. But they differ greatly with respect to their personal experiences of the formal education system, their trade union education and their unions' responsiveness to their own knowledge.

We will call the first worker "Pete Jones." Pete is in his early thirties and has worked on the assembly line for most of his adult life. His parents were both union members in other industries. He is of European ancestry and his relatives have lived in Canada for many generations. Pete is very active in his union local and he has participated heavily in his union's education programs.

The second worker, using the pseudonym "Bob English," is in his early forties. Bob and his family emigrated to Canada from the British Isles when he was eight years old. He has worked for his current employer for about twenty years. Bob's parents currently maintain the same blue-collar jobs they held previous to their move to Canada. He describes a childhood of profound impoverishment and has a very strong working-class self-identification.

While Pete's educational background includes some postsecondary college experience, Bob has completed a Bachelor's Degree in the Social Sciences, paid for courtesy of the joint negotiated 'training allowance' benefit. Bob has effectively been excluded from positions within his union. Pete sees the union from the insider's perspective, while Bob feels shut out of his union local and retains the view of an outsider who combines his own working class experience, street smarts and university level critical analysis of class relations.

The early school experiences of Pete Jones provide a good illustration of how working class kids' creative abilities have been ignored or even denigrated by the established school system. Although Pete had an active and creative childhood, at least some of his teachers saw him as just another working class kid with limited prospects. Although Pete completed his high school diploma, he found his school career an unsavory experience:

> In school I was a bad student, a horrible student....It was always a struggle. I either had teachers who understood or ones that didn't, but if I liked something I'd get right into it. ...

> In grade eight, the guidance counselor told me that I should take basic English ... mainly because my spelling was bad.... When you got to high school, all of a sudden they assume you could read and once I had to read books, like Shakespeare or whatever, guess what? They're interesting ... it was easy. So that guidance counselor in grade eight? There are kids that need a little different attention.... Then I had a math teacher who said "why don't you just skip if you have no interest in participating?" ... As soon as I could get out of high school, I did.

On the other hand, Bob English had a much more positive school experience and found himself returning to formal education repeatedly. But Bob was not always open to attaining a formal education. His early school experiences were typical of many working-class kids:

> I resisted education all through my life and now I realize, I mean, I feared it too, and now I realize there was nothing to fear. That, er, if I had it sooner I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now.

Bob is also an assembler in the same plant who had completed high school, but found that he wanted to move away from the production line and pursue a skilled trade. However after several years of pursuing the necessary education to follow this path, Bob found his original plans had shifted radically:

> They [human resources] said "you got all your academics, where's your practical?" So, okay, so I signed up ...did all the practical stuff ...[then] they cancelled the program, the apprenticeship program.

Finding himself left with an array of college courses and nowhere to apply them, Bob went back to his employer with his dilemma:

> I went down to personnel ... I said "well I'm frustrated, help me out with this. What am I going to do? Do I continue at ... college with my practical work and getting as much practical experience with my tools and trade or do I go to university?" He says: "go to university." I thought fine. Then it clicked. I'm never going to let [my employer] control my future again. Never. So I thought university's the way to go.

Bob found his attempts to obtain the prerequisites to begin a tradesperson's career an instructive life experience. Although he had conformed to the requirements of his employer's apprenticeship program at every turn, he was still left out in the cold. He resolved that he would continue his education independently, taking advantage of the employer's training allowance:

> I started with one [university] course, just to see if I was going to be successful, if I was cut out for it, and I liked it. I got a lot of stimulation from it and from that point, on my next course, after I took a science course ... I did relatively well at it, and I decided to continue. [...] and I took a Soc[iology] course and I fell in love with Soc. It was just, it just showed me where I fit into the big picture. ... going into Soc it really showed me there's a place for me somewhere in this, and I kind of liked that.

Thus Bob had found his calling not only within the formal school system, but in a discipline that helped him to interpret his own life experiences. Conversely, Pete Jones takes the view of an unstructured, informal learner with a keen sense of curiosity and enthusiasm

> If there's a piece of legislation coming, you know, I'll look at a copy at the library where they have all the pieces of legislation, and I'll look up legal language on the Internet. ... There's always something new going on, on the Internet, you know. ...With the computer, there's a little bit of a struggle involved and you'll make a mistake [or] something bad happens, but when you figure out how to do it, there's more of a sense of achievement than if you just read it.

Pete also pursues his learning through projects of a sharply political nature, an admitted passion of his. At times his union provides the fundamentals of his instruction via nonformal, continuing course-based

education:

> I'll spend time learning anything to be better, music, computers, but the union is the big passion for me, like I feel like that's the thing where I can have the most opportunity to do things. For me, it's like that's what I want to do, you know. I'd love to play music too, but realistically, if I had to choose, I'd have to take the union because you can always listen to music and you can always play it, and it doesn't matter whether people know who you are or not. But with the union, there's so much potential to change and to do things.

Bob English is emphatic as to why more working-class people, and especially trade union activists, should get a university education. Bob feels that the understanding of larger societal forces is information that is hoarded by those in the upper classes, and shared only within the confines of a university classroom:

> I mean, if you want to fight the beast you have to think like the beast. You have to know how the beast is going to move, you have to know how the beast is going to react. ... You have to know ... where they're going to come at you from. And if they're gonna use one set mode of thinking, we're as predictable as they are. And I think predictability is .. fatalistic [sic].

Moreover, Bob keenly feels his contradictory position. He is caught between his credentialed status, paid for via a contract clause which was negotiated by his own union local, and the rejection of his schooled talents by the same local:

> [I]f formal education is so terrible and to be feared, why are all these guys I work with putting their kids through university? ... Why did this union negotiate formal education and a rebate for their kids? Why? If it's to be feared – there's part of my frustration right there, it's a contradiction. Why have they negotiated formal training for me and for my kids if they're not going to respect it [once you get the degree]?

Understandably, given his lack of a credentialed background, Pete Jones feels differently about the advantages provided by a formal postsecondary education. He feels that knowledge can be obtained informally, outside of established educational institutions. Pete cites the case of Bob White, the former President of the CAW and the Canadian Labour Congress:

> You can be intelligent and not be an engineer or a lawyer, you know. Take the case of Bob White, you know, a grade eight education took him to the top of the labour movement and you'd be hard pressed to find somebody that's more qualified to speak for workers and to negotiate their issues against a group of lawyers from Detroit or the captains of industry. So, I think that's proof enough. We have people that have succeeded in the labour movement, specifically in the Canadian Auto Workers, that have limited formal education. We have other ones that are highly educated. The bottom line is that intelligence can't be proven simply by a piece of paper saying that you've successfully complete grade 8, grade 12, [or] university.

But Bob English goes further than simply advocating a program of postsecondary education for his working-class peers. He acknowledges the fact that many of his co-workers on the assembly line are equipped with real talents, although few recognized credentials. Bob advocates that his union blend those who have credentials with workers who possess experiential knowledge.

> You know ... I felt that, my education [was not] being used in a positive way towards real working class advancement. ... And it's like your own people kicking you in the teeth and saying "you're not one of us." You know, "you're not playing by the old rules." Well, it's a new world. The rules have changed. So we have to change. And we have to ... attract the

best that we have within our own working-class people. To compete with management, with the so-called upper class. We have to adapt. ... I don't have aspirations of leaving the CAW. I mean, my aspirations are advancing the working-class cause.

Overall, Pete Jones' learning interests are directly linked to his own view of social justice within a clearly defined set of social and political principles. These he learned, at least in part, at the knee of the CAW's educational programs:

> I believe in social unionism 100 percent. I believe I'm a social democrat. I believe that there should be a certain form of socialism that at its root is very democratic. It is the only way to be fair. There has to be a democracy. There is no democracy when people aren't informed on issues. How do you do that, how do you make them all aware? You can't force them into education camps or re-educate people. You can't force them to learn. You can't force them to understand or even agree with what you're talking about, but there's a lot of information that only a few people know about and they're driving the whole agenda. They're not telling the public what the issues are and there's no room for debate.

Note that Bob English possesses no less a working-class loyalty than Pete Jones. He attributes this view to his impoverished youth:

> I think we should use everything available to us to advance the working cause, the working-class cause. And I don't think that it's all ... I know the strike is a blunt instrument that works very effectively. Well, against [Ontario Premier Mike] Harris' government, it's not working at all. They're going back to work, and you're going back for sixty hours of it. So where is unionism taking us? Where is it going? It's not taking us ahead, not against guys like Mike Harris. And that's where, that's where formally educated workers come in. I'm a worker. I'll never forget my roots, because my roots are even more deeply rooted than the working-class people I work with ... because I've come from nothing.

When asked whether he believes there are blue-collar workers with talents right on the line, Bob English loudly declared: "No doubt in my mind, no doubt in my mind." But when asked whether the union was putting these people to use he replied:

> Absolutely not. ... I think it's politics, it's pure [factional] politics. ... You've got people in the union they're in there for different reasons. ... Myself [I come] from an attitude of working-class advancement – and there's guys that may feel that, but they also want to get off the line. You know there's various reasons, you know, for people wanting to get off the line or go into the union movement. I mean, I'm not saying that ... I'm just, saying we have to be aware of what's going on.

Finally, it is worth noting that both workers' sentiments with reference to the underutilization of workers' capacities and the future direction their union should support are basically analogous. And both agree that their own capacities, and those of their coworkers, are underutilized. As Bob English says:

> [I]f you're gonna go ahead you've got to have the best tools to get the job done. I mean I'm not in the Indy 500 with a stock Monte Carlo [automobile]. Why are they hiring all the best guys doing the son of a gun up, making it as scientifically aerodynamic as possible, you know, why are they doing that? You know … are we not trying to advance the working class cause through an old methodology, and I say yes. ... My first [goal] would be to negotiate a minimum of forty hours education every calendar year for every member of the CAW.

Consider Pete Jones' views on workers' control of production mindful of the fact that these views have been nurtured almost exclusively through his informal and course-based learning activities within his labour union:

> There should be greater worker control in the workplace in order to allow employees to make fuller use of their knowledge. Look at Algoma Steel [Canada's third largest steel

> company, now worker-owned]. The workers turned it around. The company lost money for what, a decade, or whatever it was. The workers took control of the company. The union took control of the company. They hired a new board, they set out to specialize. The workers knew what they could do the best, the union had a good idea and the people that they brought in weren't driven by a straight profit ideology. ... You know, anybody will say utilizing people is the most important part of the success of a corporation, of a union, of any kind of organization, fully utilizing people, you know (out emphasis). We can argue about the tools that fully utilize, whether they're adding more work or not, but to fully allow people to participate using their skills is I think a dream for most people, to be able to do what you do best or want to do and to be able to do it and function and perform in society I think.

Unfortunately the comprehensive range of workers' employment-related informal learning and knowledge generally remains unacknowledged by both employers and unions. Even in the most advanced unions, with the most extensive and wide-ranging education programs, there is still much untapped potential for critical education. Moreover there is room for union educators like Bob English who has critically appropriated university education without committing the equivalent of 'class suicide' and Pete Jones, who applies his experiential informal knowledge base.

As acknowledged by both Pete and Bob, there are many more untapped resources in the unrecognized informal knowledge and tacit skills of the general membership of this union local. Our research shows that workers train each other in the informal skills actually required to do their work-related tasks. Older, more experienced workers are often found training their younger peers. These unionists and workers should be recognized for these activities and encouraged to share their knowledge more fully with others by both their union and management. Moreover this should be carried out without the expectation that workers give up control of this knowledge. Many workers have "the talent," as Bob says, to teach others many interesting and valuable things; from political analysis to their work-related duties. Much of this knowledge can empower and expand the organized labour movement and enrich many more workers' quality of life.

Concluding Remarks

The Canadian working class is increasingly highly educated in formal terms, increasingly engaged in course-based adult education and much more widespread informal learning activities. The CAW local which is the focus of this paper has among the most extensive organized education programs in Canada. The gap between workers' actually existing knowledge and skills and the provision of worker-centred education programs is probably much greater at the other union locals we studied, as well as at most other paid workplaces in the country.

As long as the extent of working peoples' useful knowledge continues to be underestimated by leaders in the labour movement, it will continue to be depreciated by educational institutions and over-exploited by employers. Unions could quite easily further document the levels of formal and informal knowledge of their existing members, through participatory research which could be conducted quickly and at low cost largely by the members themselves (e.g. Livingstone, Sawchuk et al, forthcoming; Lior and Martin, 1998). This information could then be used as a pivotal strategic resource in campaigns with employers to negotiate better working conditions for workers to apply their skills, and with educational institutions to provide more accessible prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) processes and more relevant curricular content related to working class experience. In the growing reality of a learning society, there is very sizable pent-up demand among working people generally to link their extensive informal knowledge with more equitable formal educational access and recognition, and with more discretionary control of their jobs commensurate with their existing knowledge.

The fuller documentation and recognition of members' actually existing knowledge can provide a sound basis for:

- building more extensive education programs;
- recruiting now uninvolved, highly knowledgeable brothers and sisters to lead new union education

programs;
- making concerted demands for workplace democratization to design better quality jobs; and
- demonstrating the capacity of unions to enhance learning and work conditions.

This is probably the most strategically effective way to recruit other currently unorganized,6 but increasingly highly-educated, workers. As Bob English says:

> We don't have to hire the best [union lawyers, negotiators, educators, etc.], we've got the best within our own ranks, we do, and I firmly believe that. There's more of us than there is [sic] of them. ...We've got the talent, no doubt in my mind. I know, I work with them. I know we've got the talent. I see it.

NOTES

1. The Working-Class Learning Strategies study focused on unionized workers in auto, garment, steel, petrochemical and public sector industries in Southern Ontario. The unions representing these five sectors are as follows: Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) now UNITE, United Steelworkers of America (USWA), Communication, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP) and the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU). For further details see Livingstone, Sawchuk and contributors, (forthcoming).
2. For definitions of these three dimensions of adult learning and a review of the research literature on informal learning, see Livingstone (2001a).
3. Documentation of all of these survey findings on schooling, adult course participation and informal learning may be found in Livingstone (2001b).
4. Despite a steadily shrinking employment base, this employer and CAW union local still dominate this medium-sized Ontario Community.
5. The CAW also has an extended body of organized education and action programs around issues of politics and social and economic justice.
6. Statistics Canada notes an incremental rise in the unionization rate from 30% to 30.4%. However the increase occurred entirely within the private sector, while the public sector share fell slightly (Akyeampong, 2000).

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